

VZCZCXRO4979
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2496/01 2091413
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 281413Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2485
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002496

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/27/2017
TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: HELPFUL IRAQI VOICES ON CAPITOL HILL

REF: BAGHDAD 547

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Post requests the Department's support for a proposal to organize, in cooperation with the Council of Representatives (CoR) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), a delegation of Iraqi Members of Parliament (MPs) to travel to Washington, DC in late September to conduct meetings with members of Congress and other audiences. The goals of the trip would be threefold: to provide American and foreign audiences with a more nuanced view of the Iraqi political process, to answer growing American criticism of the Iraqi parliament, and to encourage Congressional efforts to help build the parliament as a viable institution. The trip would be scheduled after the mid-September report to avoid negative impact on drafting of benchmark legislation. End Summary.

CoR Delegation to Congress

¶2. (C) In response to harsh criticism in the American and international media, mid-level MPs from the Committee on Foreign Affairs (who reportedly discussed the issue with MFA recently) approached PolOffs about the idea of sending a CoR delegation to meet members of Congress. The MP's sought an opportunity to explain to Congress the nature of political efforts in Iraq and highlight their achievements despite perceived slow progress on benchmark legislation. They also insisted that visiting CODELS could benefit from putting "mere MP's" on their itineraries when they visit Iraq. (Note: We have encouraged CODELS not to limit their meetings to PM and Presidential personalities, yet time constraints and CODEL interests usually mean their Iraqi parliamentary counterparts are shut out of visits. End Note.)

¶3. (C) Post proposes to organize an eight member delegation of MPs including two members each from the main Sunni, Kurdish, and Shi'a blocs and two independent or minority delegates. Post would select delegation members in cooperation with the CoR leadership and the MFA with the understanding that professional proficiency in English is a necessity. The delegation could travel to Washington, DC in September 2007 to meet members of Congress to discuss the Iraqi political process. Post would schedule the trip after the mid-September report to avoid any negative impact on the benchmark legislation. Assuming the CoR resumes its previous schedule of holding sessions every other week, the trip would take place during a week parliament is not in session. A trip in tandem with the GoI delegation to the UNGA might also be feasible. Post would have the delegation meet with the Ambassador prior to departure to discuss the trip.

Parliament as Scapegoat

14. (C) The Council of Representatives has come under severe criticism from American media and politicians for planning to take a constitutionally-determined recess without achieving passage of benchmark legislation. A visit to Capitol Hill could help counter this negative perception and highlight the rational voices within the parliament. (Comment: Despite its considerable institutional weaknesses (reftel), much of the current criticism being levied against the CoR is unjustified. Many members of parliament share the frustrations of their American critics, yet wonder why the CoR extended its session into July if no important legislation will even be submitted by the GoI for the CoR to address. As of late July, the CoR still does not have a final draft of the de-Ba'athification or hydrocarbon legislation, for example. It is probable that the CoR can achieve no meaningful progress on these two key issues in July due to a lack of political consensus outside the CoR. Delays in passage of the legislation reflect the failures of the broader political dynamic more than a lack of will on the part of MPs. End Comment.)

Benefits of Testimony

15. (C) There are several benefits to having a few of the more articulate CoR members speak with Congress. Although Iraqi politics are typically analyzed through the prism of individual (usually senior) personalities, passage of the benchmark legislation, as well as the viability of the Iraqi democratic system, depends on the strength of parliament as an independent branch of government and the capabilities of its individual members. Until now, the parliament as an

BAGHDAD 00002496 002 OF 002

institution has been to a large degree neglected not only by Iraqi leaders, but also by their American Congressional counterparts. An official visit to Washington would showcase the CoR as a viable institution of the Iraqi government and could serve as the catalyst for further institution-building efforts through the fall. As many MP's have pointed out to us, the mere fact that the CoR is able to routinely assemble a quorum in the current security and political environment is quite a feat. The visit would be an opportunity to cast the parliament in a more positive light by highlighting its achievements.

16. (C) The trip could also produce political benefits. Articulate and nuanced perspectives from a cross-sectarian delegation could provide audiences in America and abroad with a better appreciation of the achievements made by the Iraqi government as well as the challenges it faces moving forward.

Such understanding is necessary for the USG to continue to see the Iraqi government as a viable partner in democratization efforts. Direct testimony from Iraqis could also blunt some of the criticism in both Western and Arab media of Iraqi political efforts as ineffectual or orchestrated by the American government. The delegation might also appear directly in the U.S. media, providing additional outreach opportunities and further reason for sending articulate English speakers. Finally, establishing relationships between Iraqi MPs and U.S. counterparts, as well as a deeper understanding of the U.S. Congress as an institution, stands to pay dividends for Iraq's march towards democracy.

17. (U) Post seeks the Department's comment, endorsement, and support of such an effort. Assuming the proposal is approved we will explore mechanisms (including public diplomacy program options) for implementing the trip.

BUTENIS